

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1491
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

The Power of Women

Konrad Bercovici



LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1491
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

The Power of Women

Konrad Bercovici

HALDEMAN-JULIUS PUBLICATIONS
GIRARD, KANSAS

Copyright,
Doubleday, Doran Company
Published by Arrangement

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE POWER OF WOMEN

Never before had the Moldavian plains, from the narrow angle where the Pruth River almost meets the feet of the Carpathian Mountains, down to the Moldava River, whose shallow, shifting bed forms the widest angle of the country—never before had the Moldavian plains known a milder winter.

In a steady, downy, milky stream the snow had played, danced, and turned somersaults in the air, yet it was hardly cold enough to keep the "Flowers of the Angel" from melting. Just cold enough to prevent the sap of the trees from rising too soon to the branches.

The younger men turned over their lambskin *coshocks* and wore them with the fur outside, as on summer days, and danced at the inns with the doors wide open. So mild a winter offered new diversions: long sleigh rides, snow battles, horse races in midwinter.

The older people, however, worried. They turned about the barns and stables from early morning to late at night, driving staves and posts, raising roofs, strengthening foundations, and digging trenches around their homes. The old folks wore long faces while their sons and daughters laughed and danced and jested.

Early spring made its appearance overnight. A snow storm's tail end became a heavy rain. The soft dirt roads and fields became a sea of yellowish mud, rippling and quivering like jelly spread too thickly on a glutton's bread. The whole earth seemed changed into an ocean of mud. And it rained and rained. The young people looked sheepishly at the older ones, wanting to know what could be done.

A few days later the sun burst through from behind the clouds.

"She will dry the fields," the young men cried joyously.

The girls tightened their red ribbons in their golden tresses, and waving their arms as they stood on the door sills, they shouted back, "She will dry the fields."

The faces of the older men were darker and longer than before.

"She will melt the snow on the mountains too rapidly. Woe to us! Woe to those below us!" they grumbled, and worked around their homes and stables with great hurry.

On the first night of Easter week the ears of the bell ringer of Stanasti caught the shrill, high sound of the church bell of Voinesti, ten miles up the river. He looked in all directions. There was no fire. Then it dawned upon him:

it was the flood. The Bistritza was overflowing.

He began to ring the bells of the church to awaken the people of his village and to warn the people farther down the river. Lame old George ceased ringing only when he heard the sound of the bells of the churches below on the river. By that time the water had risen so high that the benches and chairs were floating on the floor of his church. The inside of the church looked like a leaky boat cast on a chance shore.

In the village the people opened the doors of barns and stables so their cattle should be free to save themselves as best they might, while they, with their wives and children climbed on the roofs of their homes, where they hoisted and tied together pieces of lumber, forming rafts to float on, should the waters rise high enough.

Little children, frightened and cold, held dogs and kittens in their arms. Here and there a young lamb, beribboned and combed, the pet of a household, walked on the edge of the roof, bleating piteously. Cackling chickens were pecking at the straw, while mother hens crowded closely together, better to protect the

fluffy yellow puffs of chirping life that hastened under the spreading wings.

Toward morning the narrow, rapid ribbon of water coursing down toward the Danube had become an ocean. The Moldavian plains had changed into a sea at flood-tide. Whole families, crouching on log-tied rafts, passed floating from up-river, screaming, crying, waving their arms in the air in gestures of despair.

The waters were rising rapidly, noisily, encircling, battering, destroying, tearing, rushing. The church bells farther down the river were still ringing. The voices of the churches up the river had been silenced.

The men of Stanasti standing on their roofs called to the people on rafts floating by under their windows:

"From where?"

"From Suceava."

"Heaven forbid! From so far?" they asked, and made the sign of the cross on themselves.

Suceava was fully a hundred miles away.

"From where?" another floating group was questioned as it whirled by on a heavy barn door.

"From Bratesti."

Lying flat on a green-painted wooden church tower, a black-robed priest, bareheaded, his

arms wound round the cross, swerved rapidly by. "From Urlati," he answered to the call. "From Urlati and going to God!"

Then the Greek inkeeper of Voinesti, red-bearded and stout, rode by on an immense wine barrel. He had just opened his mouth to say a word, when twenty more of his own barrels collided with the one he was riding. It turned the barrel over. He had lashed himself to it, and rolled under and over the waves.

When the waters had risen over the roofs of the houses of Stanasti, the imprisoned rafts were lifted and sucked down to the middle of the current. While the men tried to stabilize the craft, the women pacified the crying children, who clung to their dogs and kittens and tore at the skirts of their mothers.

"May God be with you, John."

"May he be with you and yours, Nicolai," neighbors called to one another.

Another half hour, and half of the village of Stanasti was no longer. Even the tall wheel of the grist mill had been torn away, to be churned by the waters it has turned into power to help men live.

The Tatar village of Ghecet is a few miles inland on the Dobrudjean side of the Danube. Low, round mud huts, like great beehives, sit

on the ground as though strewn along the river by a giant hand.

While that winter had been very mild on the Moldavian plains, it had been a very severe one on the Dobrudjean peninsula. The Danube had frozen early in the season. The inland waters were congealed from the surface to the beds.

In other winters the Tatars got enough fish for themselves at the breathing holes of the rivers. But that winter it seemed as if the rivers had all died and ceased to breathe; that all water life had ceased forever. And the hungry wolves prowled, hanging about the huts and stables more like begging dogs than man-eating beasts.

Through the winter, the Tatar women had done their cooking with melted snow and ice. The youngsters cried and begged for living water. The fairest maidens looked fallow. Their hair had lost all gloss.

Yet the Tatar youth of Ghecet had not ceased to love. Many a young man spent a week in the thicket to get a hare, so that his beloved might taste fresh meat.

And of the youth of Ghecet none was braver than Osman, the son of Abdul, the netmaker. His skin was of a darker grain than that of the rest of his people. His nose was not so flat,

and his eyes were larger and more to the surface than the eyes of the others. His grandfather had bought for himself a woman who was of the Moors. Her blood now flowed in the veins of Abdul, the netmaker, and in the veins of Osman, his son.

And in Ghecet lived the widow, Sadi. She had inherited from her husband a number of sheep and a beautiful, clean-limbed daughter. Meli was her name. To be considered beautiful in Ghecet was no small compliment. Ghecet was renowned for its beautiful women. They were all clean-limbed, dark-eyed, bronze-skinned and with hair as black as raven feathers. When the maidens of Ghecet danced, it was as if so many divine forms of bronze had become animated. And Meli was the most beautiful of them all.

Abdul, Osman's father, offered twenty sheep for her as a wife for his son. The whole village thought Osman's father had taken into consideration the fact that Sadi was a widow and desired to compensate her for the loss of a daughter's help, although Abdul had let it be known that he offered so many sheep for Meli as wife for his son and not because of charity. Sadi, having heard the rumors, reserved answer to the offer until the following day.

"I am a widow and in need of counsel," she pleaded humbly.

That evening, as they sat on the floor matting in the round hut, Sadi asked her daughter, "Does Osman love you very much?"

"Oh, Mother! Does not his father offer twenty sheep?"

"They say some of these sheep are charity, to compensate me for the loss of your help," said Sadi, looking into her daughter's eyes. "I wonder if he loves you as much as your father loved me?"

Meli flew into her mother's arms, crying, "Mother! Mother!"

"Oh, you need not be alarmed, my daughter. Yet, if I were you, I should want to know whether all the sheep were price for myself."

"How could I learn the truth, Mother? Speak, Mother, speak!" Meli begged.

"His father offers twenty sheep. If Osman loves you, you could make him ask of his father ten more sheep. And if he then pays for you thirty sheep, with the fleece on them, you will know they were paid for you. Your father paid that for me—thirty sheep!"

"I shall know how much Osman loves me," Meli answered with great decision.

The following evening Abdul came to hear.

Sadi's answer. He wore his best clothes, as a man should when he comes to offer thirty sheep for the wife to his son.

"It is a third of all I have, Sadi, but my son loves your daughter, and I love my son. The Koran says, 'Forget you are a merchant when you buy from a widow.'"

Sadi offered him a cushion on her rug and bade him smoke her husband's narghile, but she asked again a week's time. She was in need of advice.

"What say you to that?" triumphantly asked Meli when Abdul was gone.

She had listened to their conversation from behind a heavy rug that divided the hut into two compartments.

"That my daughter is wonderful and that she is worthy of the best man in the Dobrudja."

"Well, and does not the best man not live in Ghecet—and is he not Osman? And is he not my future husband, Mother?" Meli cried out, kissing her mother.

Then the widow took her daughter's head in her lap, stroking her hair; she spoke to her long and convincingly of the ways of men and the power of women. Meli agreed not to see Osman the whole week and to do what her mother should ask. The more a man paid for

a woman, the kinder he would later be to her, Sadi impressed on her daughter.

Osman came to the widow's hut and called for his beloved an hour after his father had been there. She did not open her window to talk to him. He called her name again and again. Instead of her soft voice he heard the harsh one of her mother:

"This is a widow's home, Osman. We have to work hard. Don't disturb our rest."

When Osman returned to his hut, the net-maker looked at his son and understood. He loved Osman, his only son. The boy was strong, a good fisherman, a good netmaker, unafraid, and a good son.

"Go to the widow's hut and offer thirty-five sheep," the father advised after a few minutes' silence.

"Oh! Do you believe that to be the cause?" the son wondered.

"Do as I say."

That same evening Osman went to Sadi's hut and cried aloud under the window: "Father offers thirty-five sheep! Father offers thirty-five sheep!"

Yet the widow's window remained closed. Meli did not answer. From behind other win-

dows he heard the insolent laughter of the women of the neighborhood.

Osman returned home. At the end of the week, as Sadi had not brought the answer, Abdul visited the widow again. He offered forty sheep for Meli—which was more than had ever been paid for a wife.

“Osman is strong and handsome, and not a cripple for whom a woman has to be bought with great price of gold,” he argued. “Give me your answer now.”

Sadi begged for more time. “Only two more days, Effendi Abdul. I have promised my deceased husband never to answer before having counsel with a certain man.”

When Abdul had bowed his gray head and was gone, the widow embraced her daughter.

“I know you love your mother, Meli. Abdul now offers twice as many sheep as he offered a few days ago. And he shall offer yet more if you but listen to me.”

“I shall do whatever you tell me,” Meli answered after a moment’s thought. “For I want all to know that I am the most loved woman in Ghecet.”

“Don’t let Osman see you for another week.

.”

Meli paled. She loved Osman. Yet the

thought that it would be known in the whole Dobrudja that sixty sheep were paid for her made her agree an hour later to her mother's wish—though her eyes were red from weeping.

Already the unprecedented offer for Meli was the talk of the village. In the harems women spoke of nothing else.

Two nights later Osman, bent in body and spent from sleeplessness, came to the widow's hut at midnight, while the storm raged and the wolves howled, and cried out:

"My father offers fifty sheep."

Meli wanted to open the window, but her mother held her back.

"Mother, his voice trembles. He is sick, heartbroken," the daughter cried, trying to free herself from the hard, lean arms of her mother.

"Have patience one more day, my daughter," the widow entreated.

When Osman left the window, her mother began to comb her long hair as she spoke to her soothingly. The widow knew how much stronger and more resolute a woman feels when her hair is combed.

"He will come tomorrow night. He will come. Are you not the most beautiful girl in Ghecet? He will come. He surely will come,"

Sadi repeated, combing the long raven hair of her daughter.

But Osman did not come the following night. And Sadi was told by a neighbor that although his father had asked him to go and offer the last sheep of the shed, Osman had refused. He could not so impoverish his father.

Meli cried the whole day and waited for Osman to come. What cared she for sheep? Yet she had to wait. She could not go to him. It was the custom of her people.

"He will surely come tonight," the widow soothed her weeping daughter, though she was not so certain herself.

And when Osman did not come another and another night, the widow had nothing to say as she watched her almost insane daughter tear her hair.

One morning, Abdul said to his son: "I shall this hour go to the widow and offer her all my sheep that Meli may become your wife. Am I to measure my happiness by the count of sheep?"

"Pray, don't," begged Osman, touching his father's arm, "for I shall be the laughing stock of the whole country, while the women will sing her praises that she has cowed two men from reason. Am I a cripple, or is my father

guilty of all the seventy sins, that we should pay what she demands? I love Meli, but she is only a tool in the hands of her mother."

While Abdul was listening to his son, men came running into the village. Sheets of water were spreading over the frozen Danube as if another river were trying to cover up the old one. And so fast did the new waters come from upstream that the cold had no time to freeze them.

A few moments later the whole male population had left the village and was plodding in heavy hip boots through the few miles of unbroken snow that spread to the shore of the river. The Danube had risen several feet. On the Dobrudjean side it was spreading out over the low marshes, filling up the mud huts of the fishermen. As if heaved by a terrific power, the ice of the river was bending upward, then it swelled and burst open with loud explosions. Large pieces of ice were shot high into the air, like pellets from a shotgun. The ice rose, heaved, and broke the armature of the long winter. Water, the strongest enemy of ice, invaded from below and above.

For hours the detonations, louder than those of powerful cannon, deafened man and beast. Huge, ragged floes, continually nibbled at by

the fresh flowing water, turned, circled, crowded together, and settled into flight, like a horde of white sheep before the rush of an enemy. Before the sun had gone half its course, that day, the Danube was again a freely flowing river.

The old river receded into its bed. Soon different things began to float on the crests of waves. Sheds, roofs of houses. A cross, sticking out from a half-submerged wooden church steeple, rushed by as if hurrying to a last benediction. Behind the cross floated carcasses of animals, and corpses. . . . The Tatars stood and watched, awestricken, hypnotized by the dreadful spectacle.

Of a sudden, loud voices were heard, and a raft, floating sideways, turned rapidly upon itself and passed with such speed that it was nothing but a speck in the distance by the time the Tatars recovered their senses. Only the cry of the unfortunates, carried on the wind that was blowing diagonally against the current of the river, still reached their ears. And those cries were heartrending!

"Rope and hook," cried Osman to several of the younger boys.

Osman assumed leadership in the rescue work. Another and another raft swerved past

before several long, thin hemp ropes and sharp hooks were brought from the huts of the fishermen. When another raft was seen at a distance, one of the Tatars advanced as far as he dared into the waters and threw the rope with the hook at the end of it toward the drifting craft. He missed it. Another and another raft passed by, drawn, sucked by the distant sea. The Tatar efforts at rescue were unsuccessful.

Slowly the sun was setting. The bright yellow gold changed into a deep red ball, receded behind the hills, leaving a long trace as of living blood, on the turbulent blue of the waves. The older Tatars returned with bowed heads to their homes, disheartened by what they had seen. Only Osman and a few others remained. They stood to their waists in water, with coiled rope around their arms, ready to attempt the saving of unfortunates. But when a raft passed, it was either too far away, or it tore loose from the hook.

The moon rose. Night was falling.

"Let's return to our homes," one of the young men said. "I am numb with cold."

"Mechmet is right," said another one, and the two began to wade toward the shore.

"If it is the will of Allah that they be saved,

they will be saved. Come, Osman," a third one counseled.

"It is the will of Allah that I remain here," Osman answered. "Go home, each of you. I remain here. Allah be with me."

The others had hardly left the shore when Osman heard loud cries of a woman. On the silvery blue of the water, glistening in the moonlight, a shimmering, golden fleece was floating on the crest of a foaming wave. Another moment and Osman distinguished a human form lying flat on a floating piece of timber.

The cry of despair was so piercing that Osman struck out and swam, calling out hopeful words. The long hair of the woman was like glittering gold between the mirrors of silver from above and below.

Osman swam toward the middle of the river and threw the coiled rope with all the might in his arm. The hook caught the floating timber. A second later Osman was shaken by a powerful jerk that almost broke him in two, for the other end of the rope was tied around his waist. Slowly, fighting hard, resisting with all his strength the current of the river that seemed reluctant to give up its prey, slowly

Osman, giving some of the slack rope, dragged himself and the raft toward the shore.

While drifting along with the current, he had gone down fully four miles beyond the point of his own village. When his feet struck bottom, he turned. The woman had jumped down, and wading to her waist, she was running to her savior's side.

Osman, hardly able to stand on his feet because of fatigue, looked at her. Never before had he seen a woman with hair so golden. It was too dark for him to see anything but her hair. They looked at each other in silence. Osman caught her in his right arm when her knees sagged as she tried to speak. To arouse himself from his reverie, he pulled at the rope to free the hook from the jerking raft and loosen the noose that held it to his waist. That done, he looked at her again.

A long wave of gold, parted on a white forehead, fell below the waist. The young girl looked at him. She was so weak she could not walk. He kept her in his arms after several attempts to steady her on her feet, and carried her to a little mound up the shore. Her wet clothes, a narrow brown skirt over a homespun waist, clung tightly to her shivering body. He, too, was wet and cold. His heavy fur coat was

at the point where he had entered the water, four miles away.

Taking long strides without looking at the burden in his arms, he began to run. He felt her warmth as he held her close against him. It warmed his body. He felt the beat of her heart. The wind was blowing her hair in his flushed face.

When he reached the point on the shore where his coat was lying on the ground, he was so warm he forgot why he had come. The girl looked at him while she was knotting her loose hair. He looked at her. The moon was high. Never before had he seen such eyes. Never before had he seen skin so white, with such glow, and such full slenderness around a woman's neck. She was made of sky and combings of gold and milk.

They looked at each other a long time before either of them said a word. Osman, who knew a few words of Rumanian, put the fur coat about her and said:

"Do you want to rest?"

As she did not answer, he searched for his flint. It was in one of the coat pockets. Gathering a few dry twigs, he lit a fire and bade her sit near it while he searched for more wood. In a few moments he joined her. Never before

had she seen a man so dark—so dark. So quiet, so lithe, and so powerful. They sat and looked at each other through the smoke of the fire. And though voices were again calling from the river they did not hear. The inner voice of the heart shut out all voices without. A listening heart has a deaf ear.

Of a sudden there came a loud call from inland. A desperate woman's voice was crying in the Tatar tongue: "*Moi Allim?*"—Where are you?

Osman rose rapidly to his feet. "Meli!" he cried.

A few moments later she made her way to where the fire was burning, and looked, startled, at the blonde, barefooted, half-naked, creature before her. She had never seen such a golden blonde in her life. There was no such being in the whole Dobrudja. What was she doing here, sitting near a fire with Osman?

Osman watched them look at each other. The woman he had saved looked at Meli with frank curiosity, while the other's face, after the first flush of astonishment, showed resentment—hate.

Fatigue and anger had robbed Meli's face of her beauty and freshness. Her blazing black eyes, the hard lines around the mouth, and her

disheveled hair made her look very much like her hard and shrewd mother. Her mother!

"I have worried, my love," Meli said sweetly to Osman, going toward him and bringing her hands up to his shoulders. "I was anxious, when they told me you were here alone. And I have come to tell you that twenty sheep are all my mother really wants. That she asked more was a jest—to try your love."

Osman looked at the other woman as he put Meli's hands down.

"Allah has willed differently," was all he answered.

Like a goaded panther Meli flew at the other woman. But Osman was just as quick. His big body was between them. Cursing and crying, Meli beat his chest with her two fists, as one beats a drum. He offered no resistance to Meli. He only protected the other one. As unexpectedly as she had started, Meli ceased her attack and, tearing her hair and crying aloud, cursing her mother, she ran in the direction of her village. Her voice was still within earshot when Osman made a sign to the frightened girl to follow him. She did not know the Tatar tongue, while he knew but few Rumanian words.

After they had walked a few minutes, he no-

ticed she was lagging behind. Without a word he lifted her in his powerful arms.

He could hear Meli's wailings when he reached the village. Daylight was breaking. The older people began to stir, for they had cattle to attend to. Meli wailed, and several old women went to comfort her. Osman met them as he entered his father's hut, holding the swooning woman in his arms. The knot she had made of her hair had loosened, and the golden waves were hanging low, almost touching the ground.

"What carries Osman, Abdul's son, in his arms?" an old woman asked, as she stopped him with her bony fingers and looked into the milk white face of the girl.

"Allah has sent her to me on the waters," he answered.

It did not take long to revive her. Abdul, the netmaker, abandoned his bed and prepared some warm milk, which the girl drank with avidity. They made her swallow a few soft eggs, then put her to sleep under the warm covers of velvet-soft, white sheepskin.

The whole day long, Osman stood guard at the door of the hut, while Meli behind her own curtained window wailed like a madwoman. The inhabitants of the village, young and old,

begged the privilege of catching a glimpse of the golden woman Allah had sent to Osman on the waters . . . to recompense him; because he was a good son . . . and because of the greed of Meli's mother.

Toward the evening the golden woman opened her eyes. Osman offered her some warm milk. Then he called in old Tirza, she who was his own dead mother's sister, and the friendliest to him. He asked her to minister to the *ghiaour* woman.

An hour later, Tirza appeared and announced that the golden woman's name was Sava and that she was waiting to see the man who had saved her. The whole male population was in and about Abdul's hut. The women and children asked to see the golden woman.

Sava, rested, fed, somewhat refreshed by the long sleep under warm covers, was sitting on a corner of the wolfskin-covered divan near the fireplace in which smoked a large square piece of peat. By contrast with the dark, brown faces around her, her own skin appeared even whiter than it was.

"Rose-honey kissed by the sun," Marouf, the poet of the village, called it. The sheen of her hair was brighter, and her blue eyes were even bluer, than in the morning.

"A piece of the blue day breaking into the darkness of the night," the same poet explained, clasping and unclasping his hands.

Her feet were still bare, and her strong, long limbs showed their outline through the thin dress she wore.

Abdul and Osman stood right and left of her, as if to guard her.

The Tatars looked at her with frank amazement, as children look at a new toy. Sava smiled and laughed. Once or twice she caught hold of a chubby, dark little youngster and patted him.

"When she laughs and her red lips part over her white teeth—it is as if a breeze had blown the petals of a daisy," the poet exclaimed again.

"Now," Abdul said, "this is my home. The woman is my son's guest, and she is very weak. My friends will think of that."

The hut was hushed and emptied of the curious. Meli's wailing was heard even clearer than before.

"Twenty sheep. Ten sheep. No sheep at all!" cried Meli's mother, who had burst through the crowd.

She knelt before Abdul and kissed his hands.

"I have no answer to make, widow," Osman's

father replied as he led her out. And speaking to his son, he said: "I go to the stable. Remain thou here and minister to her."

Sava and Osman tried to converse. He made signs and combined strange words. She did not understand what he meant. They sat and watched each other, he on the straw mat and she on the divan. Never before had she seen such a brown man, such a dark, bronze face. Never before such poise and strength. And his eyes were so black . . . so black and deep and mysterious! One could read and see in them all one longed to see. It was like looking in a deep pool. One could look, and look, and look, and still feel that there was more to be seen behind the surface. In her own village the men were fair, with blue eyes, blue as daylight. One could know at a glance whether the man was truthful or not. Blue-eyed men were all so obvious. There was no mystery about them. They were like midday, and always the same. This brown-skinned, black-eyed, curly-haired giant before her was different from any man she had ever seen.

A sudden weakness overcame her again while she was making these discoveries. She resisted as long as she could the choking sensation in her throat; then she stretched out her arms.

Her hands clutched the air, and she fell backward, unconscious.

Osman gave a loud cry. His father came in, running. The golden woman had swooned. The old man rushed out and called several of the older women to minister to her. Wrinkled and hobbling old Chady, sorceress, midwife, and *shaman*, she of the thousand herb remedies, was the first to appear.

"A golden *medjidie* if you restore her to health," Osman begged as she began to undress the prostrate maiden.

She did not answer. Her wrinkled face gave no sign that she had heard what was said.

"Two *medjidies*," he begged.

She looked at him with her piercing, doubtful eyes and answered, "If Allah will be kind to her, my son."

Osman was beside himself with grief. Another and another woman, called by Abdul, crowded the tent. Osman was relieved to see them all so anxious to help. He was ready to promise gold pieces to each one of them. The flood, the river, the ice, the people of his village, his own father, receded from his mind. Only one existed, and she was fighting death.

As he was being pushed out by several

women, because they were undressing the stranger, Meli's mother appeared at the door.

"Why have you come?" Osman asked, barring the way to the divan.

"To help the stranger, Osman."

But Osman would not let her in. "You could help her better by returning to your home," he answered.

Without turning around, Osman caught Sadi by the sleeve and said very loudly:

"One doctor is enough, Chady. Tell them all to leave until they are called by you."

He remained standing at the door until the last woman had left the sick room. As they passed him they muttered:

"May Allah help her. If only because she is your guest!"

Then he sat down outside on the sill, bowed his head, and prayed fervently. Abdul, his father, came and sat by him. His son's joys were his joys. His son's sorrows were his sorrows. Father and son often prayed together. They felt nearer each other when praying. They communed, and it gave them one will.

A few hours later, Chady came out and said: "She speaks a language I do not understand. But even if I were to understand the language, the sense would escape me. The blood within

her is at a boiling point. The best we can do is to pray."

So they prayed again.

Men passed by, carrying things they had picked up on the river. Fresh carcasses of cows and oxen, good yet for food. Whole sheds that had been torn from their moorings, and dozens of live ducks and geese that had reached the shore when the waters subsided. The village, generally so silent, for Tatars are slow and quiet of speech, became loud with the tales of the returning youngsters. The waters were falling again.

All this concerned Osman very little. Chady had returned to the hut, to the sick-bed. It was night again. His father had gone to sleep. The strong moonlight paled the stars and obscured the dark blue sky. A deep silence settled over the brown mud-houses of Ghecet. From time to time Osman's prayers were disturbed by the loud wails of Meli. She cried—not as one cries because of a lost love, but as cries a woman who has failed to say yes at the right moment. He heard her quarrel with her mother. She cursed her, called her vulgar nicknames, and threw crashing things on the floor.

On the third morning, Chady spoke to Os-

man's father while he was bending over a torn net under repairs.

"How many sheep had you promised to the widow for Meli as a wife for Osman?"

"She offered her last for ten sheep," he answered, cautiously.

"So, then, though I have heard you offer forty and more, I ask if four golden *medjidies* are not less than the price of even ten sheep?"

"Chady, they are thine," he answered joyously.

"How is she?" asked Osman, rising to his feet.

"She has opened her eyes and calls for you, Osman. Come in, my son, and look at her."

Sava, paler and more golden than ever, with her moist hair spread under her head, held her languid blue eyes open long enough to see the tears in the sunken, black eyes of her savior. Then she closed them again in peaceful sleep, while Chady looked triumphantly at Osman. The old sorceress beckoned him to leave the hut as softly as he had come in. Outside, father and son touched each other's foreheads and knelt down in prayer.

Meanwhile the Danube had withdrawn to its bed, and the marshes of the shore began to dry under the strong spring wind and the sun-

shine. Trade boats with white sails, and fisher-boats with patches of sail of all colors, sailed in all directions. What has been has been. Floods pass and return. Only the bed of the river remains as it was, unto eternity.

WOLVES

This is the story of Lica, the man wolf, the brigand who had spread terror about the valleys that lie like wooded saucers at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. The old district of Oltu, where the first soldiers of the Emperor Trajan had settled down two thousand years ago, had never known bandit more audacious, more pitiless.

And it is also the story of Cornel, the gipsy fiddler, whose hut was so close to the River Oltu that he had a rowboat moored at the wall to travel up and down and across the river, to play at the festivals, the weddings and funerals, the christenings and dances at the churches and inns of the neighborhood. Of old Cornel the peasants said that he never played for money, only for the pleasure of giving pleasure. That which was given him at the end of every festival, and given liberally of gold and silver, was given him so that he might live till the next wedding or dance. And they wanted Cornel to live well. The tall young men in

their tight, snow-white trousers, over which hung a wide-sleeved homespun shirt embroidered with yellow and black at the neck, and girded by a large red sash—the men loved to dance with the sandaled maidens, whose tasseled green skirts spread and circled as they whirled and turned to Cornel's dance tunes. The gipsy made their limbs sing.

And so that you may understand the story of Lica better, I shall have also to tell the story of Herta, Cornel's dark-eyed, soft-voiced, black-haired daughter. Of Herta people said that her face was like the young moon framed by a dark night. And yet she was so sweet it was a wonder bees did not mistake her for a flower. There were many young men who desired her as wife, but she seemed so distant from earthly desires that the most forward one dared not ask her to marry him. Speaking of her, the older women of the village said her ears were always tuned to hear the call of someone far away.

And I shall also have to tell why the country was for years ravaged by wolves. Cornel and his daughter were guilty of all that the beasts destroyed. Kind people are frequently the cause of great misfortunes.

Cornel believed that killing animals, even

for food, was criminal, and because of this belief he and his daughter lived only on what the soil produced, never eating any animal food.

One day, after a wolf hunt, while the happy peasants were celebrating, drinking foaming red wine from green clay cups, Cornel mused that the men who had killed some forty beasts had not done the right thing. He looked with sadness at the heap of thick-furred, silver-brown carcasses, and argued with Papa Tanase, the priest of the village, that wolves were also not so cruel and dangerous as men made them out to be. Wolves were also God's creatures, and He did not give them life so that they should be shot down by men.

Cornel thought so, the fat innkeeper remarked, because he had seldom if ever met a live wolf, and also because he did not own flocks of sheep and herds of cattle from which young calves frequently strayed away to pasture in adjoining forests.

"You are a good fiddler and a God-fearing man, Cornel," Papa Tanase patronizingly explained, "but the Almighty meant something you do not understand when He gave to man hands and weapons to defend himself. Better play something for us, Cornel. As long as you play, we shall listen to you. About wolves,

however, Cornel, you had better listen to us."

Cornel tucked his fiddle under his coat and refused to play.

"Won't you play today?" the smith asked with thickened tongue, holding a foaming cup of wine and approaching the gipsy. "A joyous tune, Cornel. Coax a joyous tune to celebrate the saving of so many sheep from the jaws and claws of forty wild beasts."

Cornel shook his head and stroked his long, pepper-gray beard. "I can't play today."

"Come, play," urged another peasant. "I have slain three beasts myself. Drink with me. Here!"

And he filled a cup which he offered to the gipsy as he wound his arm around his neck.

Cornel freed himself and shook his head energetically. "No, no, I won't play today."

They were all offended by his behavior.

"Look at that *tzigan*!" called out the innkeeper. "One might think that the wolves were his brothers. How he mourns them! He has lived twenty years in this place, on our river, gardening on its shores, playing at our weddings and funerals, yet he is brother to the beasts of prey. You can't make a human being out of a *tzigan*."

The innkeeper's words found echo in the

hearts of many. Their minds were already befogged by the fumes of wine and prune juice. They crowded Cornel from all sides.

"We don't ask you whether you want to play. We tell you to play, *tzigan*," thundered the staggering, red-bearded, brown-muscled blacksmith.

The priest wedged his way through the crowd toward the gipsy.

"Let him go to his hut. He is in no mood to play today, men." Putting his arm around the neck of the gipsy, he led him out of the door and to the road. "Go home, Cornel. They are excited and drunk."

When the two men were twenty paces away from the inn, the smith called from its door, "Stand still, *tzigan*," and leveling his long, double-barreled old Turkish pistol, he shot a hole through Cornel's tall fur cap.

"So that you remember this day and year," he shouted above the laughter of the others who had come to the door to see the joke.

"You have angered your friends. May God be with you," the priest admonished the fiddler when the smoke had cleared, and leaving him alone on the road, he returned to the inn.

Cornel's daughter Herta was talking to a hunch-backed pack peddler when she saw her

father coming. She left the man standing over his wares and ran to meet her father, wondering to see him come home so early on such a day—when there was to be great merriment at the inn. She tucked her thick, long black braids into the neck opening of her homespun shirt as she ran toward him. She was anxious. Embracing the old man, she asked with troubled voice:

“Are you ill? *Tatuca!* You look tired and worn! Have your strings snapped? All of them?”

The father put his arm about his daughter's waist and walked beside her. She was his great joy and pride.

“I am well, Daughter. The strings have not snapped. They will hold yet—until your wedding—then I will buy new ones, so that the man who will marry you shall remain faithful forever.”

He saw the pack trader at his door.

“Who is that man?”

“Oh, he wants to sell me beads and rings and things but I want none of his wares. But tell me why you are coming home so soon. The men have come back from the wolf hunts. There will be dancing at the inn tonight. All the girls are getting ready for tonight.”

"I am in no mood to play, Herta."

The girl paced quietly near her father, whose arm tightened about her waist. She knew that when he was in no mood to play, it was better to let him brood. She had learned that from her mother, who had died the previous year. He brooded days and nights at a stretch, looking at the flowing river in the summer and gazing at the burning logs in the fireplace in the winter time. Then suddenly he would start up with a cry or a loud laugh, grip his fiddle, and begin to play.

Sometimes he marched down the road, toward the inn, playing, waking people from their sleep or disturbing them in the middle of a work-day, until they followed him in night clothes or working garb, leaving a warm bed, or the oxen yoked to the plow, to come and carouse with him at the inn. On such occasions, wives did not see their husbands for a week, unless they joined them at the white pine table of the inn. But the women were never angry when the men were with Cornel. The poor men could not help it. It proved how much good there was in them. Cornel was playing. They worked better after listening to the gipsy. They were kinder and more loving after that. Papa Tanase had once said that

there were a thousand angels asleep in Cornel's fiddle, and that wherever Cornel was with his fiddle stood the house of God.

The pack trader stood at the door, when father and daughter neared their home.

"Go your way. I desire none of your things," Herta told him as she entered the hut with her father's arm about her waist.

The peasants, drunken and sullen, called out vile names as they passed the gipsy hut that night. Even the wheelwright, Jorga, who had never yet spoken of Herta without praising her beauty—it was he who had said he wondered why bees didn't cluster about her, mistaking her for a flower—even Jorga, on passing the hut, dragging the two wolf pelts on a rope, called out:

"Never knew your father was brother to a wolf! One can never know who the father of a *tzigan* may be! No wonder you are not married yet! You expect a wolf to offer you marriage."

Jorga's remark wounded Herta deeply. He was a handsome young man, and she had hoped he would some day ask her to marry him.

That Sunday there was much drinking, but no dancing, at the inn. The men returned to their homes sullen and angry. The crying of

the beaten wives pierced the moonless night. The dogs howled. Drunken men are beasts on moonless nights. Herta lay on her bed and looked at her father. He had hardly moved from the place in two days. He sat facing the wall, eyes wide open, leaning his bearded chin on his hands, which were folded over the heavy knob of a stick, and thought and thought. He was deaf to all the curses thrown at him by the passing peasants, deaf to the thumps of stones that rattled against his door and fell at his feet through the broken small window panes.

"*Tzigan*, cursed *tzigan*, brother to the wolf!" the villagers cursed.

"If men could be as kind to wolves as they are, occasionally, to dogs, then they would not need to go on killing them," Cornel finally said to his daughter on Monday morning. "I have lived here twenty years now. The peasants have mostly been kind to me. But where I have come from—it was different."

Herta was too happy to see her father emerge out of his brooding mood to listen to what he said. She warmed some food and hovered over him while he ate. He fell asleep with the spoon in his hand. She took his boots off and put

him to bed although it was broad daylight. He was so weak and so tired!

That night there was great joy at the inn. Cornel was playing again, playing better than ever. The smith kissed his hands and begged that Cornel exchange his ruined fur cap with him. And when the gipsy refused, he sewed two good pieces where the holes had been shot through.

"Forgive me, Cornel. Forgive me, brother," he cried, tears rolling down his drunken face.

Before the night was old, the wives and sons and daughters of the village crowded the inn. Daylight found the men and the women still drinking and singing. The youngsters that were too tired from dancing were asleep on the floor, near the walls, or were outside talking of love and making trysts. The innkeeper, drunk himself, had obtained forgiveness from the gipsy and had, in honor of that evening, opened the wooden faucet of a tall barrel of red wine that was standing in the center of the shop, and allowed the juice to run freely.

"To baptize the renewed friendship. Drink, brothers. Cornel is my friend again," he cried, weeping on the fiddler's shoulder.

Cornel had hardly left his hut, that evening, when the pack trader rapped at the window.

"What do you want here at night?" Herta asked.

She had been singing softly to herself, happy that her father was himself again.

"I heard your voice, so I thought of a certain necklace I have. It's just the thing for a neck like yours," the trader answered, and entered the door before she bade him come in.

"I won't buy anything from you now, stranger," she defended herself.

Herta's eyes were already fastened on the shimmering waters of the necklace of precious stones, which the trader dangled from one of his fingers.

"Just try it on," he urged, approaching her.

"No, no," Herta protested.

She was frightened. It was so beautiful a thing! She could not buy it.

But the man had already passed the necklace over her head and was looking at her.

Herta looked at him. He carried a heavy pack on his hunched shoulders. He had not even thought of loosening the straps when he had come into the hut. The weight of the pack did not seem to tire him. Her eyes caught the play of muscles under the sleeves. She looked at his hands. The grain of the skin was fine and young. And his eyes were large and wide

open. They were not at all the eyes of a tired man, and younger than his bearded face. It frightened her to observe these details.

"Now, you had better go, stranger. I won't buy anything. Come when my father is here."

She opened the door.

"As you wish."

He took a step toward the door. There he straightened up and looked at Herta.

"If there is another man between me and you, I shall take the measure for his coffin," he called as he did so.

Before Herta had had time to recover herself, the man was gone.

Scared, Herta looked at the necklace that was still dangling on her breast. The darker the room grew, the more beautiful the waters in the jewels. The milky fire of the quiet pearls, the passionate skies of the opals, and the mysterious tracteries of the topaz merged into each other. Frightened, the gipsy girl took off the necklace, and with the jewels in her hand, she ran toward the inn to be under the protection of her father. She intended to tell him what had happened, but when she saw him happy and surrounded by the joyous peasants, she smiled her best smile and said, hugging him:

"I, too, have come to dance."

Jorga, the wheelwright, locked his arm with hers, and the priest smilingly asked:

"When shall I officiate at the wedding?" For it was no secret that the boy was in love with the gipsy girl. They laughed at the priest's sally and applauded, but Herta squeezed her fingers on the necklace in her hands and felt she was already dancing with a corpse. The words of the pack trader, "I shall measure him for his coffin," still rang in her ears.

Encouraged by the dance, Jorga asked her, when they sat down, "What answer shall I give to Papa Tanase, Herta?"

A deathly pallor came over her face. That necklace was still in her hand. She did not answer. She turned partly away to drop the necklace into her bosom. She heard Jorga talking, but she did not hear what he was saying. It seemed to her that the fires of the jewels were burning themselves into her heart. It was as if the other man were there under the garment, holding her, and listening.

Suddenly, when Jorga said something about love, she jumped up.

"Don't say such things to me, Jorga. He will kill you."

"I did not know there was another one," Jorga answered, standing up.

Then he went over to the counter and drank glass after glass of brandy, refusing to join in the dances or songs of the others.

Two things happened that morning. On his way home, Cornel, half drunk, holding on to the arm of his daughter, discovered a wolf pup whining on the road. Herta took the shivering, little, furry thing in her arms, and they brought it to their hut, where they put it down between the two pups tugging at the breasts of the sleeping mother dog. Cornel, who was rapidly recovering his senses, watched the wolf pup feeding itself and muttered to his daughter: "We shall see! We shall see!" Then he went to sleep.

Herta did not go to her bed. So many things had happened to her. That necklace, the pack trader, Jorga! And now the wolf pup. . . . Suddenly there were loud cries in the village.

While the people had been at the inn the dogs had been poisoned, and horses, oxen, and sheep had been driven off into the mountains. It was Lica's work—Lica, the wolf man, the brigand, head of the robbers, and thieves, who preyed on the peasants of the neighborhood, and whose name was blasphemed in the

churches, and for whose capture the government had offered a prize—a thousand ducats in gold, dead or alive.

The next few weeks were agog with excitement for the village. The gendarmes came, and after questioning everybody, they organized hunts through the wooded mountains. When they returned, after several false arrests of innocent travelers, they swore at the peasants, calling them liars and thieves, smiled at the girls, emptied a wine barrel at the inn, and departed, not to be heard of again until the next occasion. There was too much sorrow for dancing or festivities. It was too early in the season to plow. The villagers got drunk. But their drunkenness did not lead to gaiety—it was to smother sorrow.

“Let’s drink, brothers. One works only for wolves and bandits. Oxen will soon have to be replaced by men and women yoking themselves at the head of the plow. Let’s drink, brothers.”

The women cried. The men walked about morosely eyeing the mountains. If they only got their hands on Lica! They would tear him to pieces with their hands.

Cornel did not seem much concerned with the sorrows of the village. He was engrossed

watching the wolf pup being fed and mothered by the dog. The whole day long, he watched the wolf pup playing with the dog pups of the litter. He was a Carpathian wolf, and his neck was stiff, as of one piece, so that he had to turn completely around every time the pups attacked him from behind. The dog pups learned that very soon, and they would tussle and crowd and pull him, always coming from behind. Cornel laughed so loud that many a neighbor, not knowing the cause, thought the gipsies rejoiced in the misfortune of the village.

Cornel was so absorbed with the wolf pup that he did not notice his daughter growing paler from day to day. Every time Jorga came near the hut, she trembled like a leaf, and yet she did not know whether she trembled because of Jorga's danger or because of the other man. She knew that the necklace he had given her was of genuine jewels. He must have stolen them. A thief!

Yet she never said a word about that matter even to her father; never showed him the jewels the man had given her.

But sorrow, like joy, does not last forever. The snow melted fast. The Easter holidays were approaching. There was no good in blinding oneself weeping. God will compensate

the people of the village with some marvelous harvest. Papa Tanase said so. He spoke consoling words at the church on Sunday. There were eggs to be colored and painted, *cozonatches*, cakes, to be baked, new garments had to be finished. From the church the peasants went to the inn. The sorceress of the village, Baba Tana, said that if every inhabitant were to paint a coffin on every eleventh egg and think of Lica as they did so, Lica would die before the year was over. Of course, the egg with the painted coffin should be given to her for further incantation purposes. Easter night she would feed the shadows on eggs and ask for Lica's life in compensation.

When they had all assembled at the inn someone suddenly asked:

"Where is Cornel?"

"Haven't seen him in weeks," the innkeeper replied, "neither him nor his daughter."

"Something is the matter with that *tzigan* pair," argued Radu, the shepherd, Cornel's nearest neighbor. "You hear Cornel laugh from early morn to late at night, as if he watched the antics of a baby. Herta walks about sad-eyed and morose. Does anybody know? Ha?" And he turned around with questioning eyes.

The bearded men looked at the youngster, who returned the stare frankly.

"Well," continued Radu, who was very superstitious, "you can't tell whom *tzigans* will befriend. Didn't they forge the nails to crucify our Savior with? They did—well."

"Of course, that about forging the nails for the Cross is true. Yet I can't believe Cornel is up to anything against us!" argued the repentant blacksmith.

"Let's go and see," proposed Jorga.

They marched down to Cornel's hut. He and his daughter were sitting on their haunches and watching the play of the pups. The peasants looked at Radu and burst out in a concert of loud laughter. It was the first laughter in more than a month heard in the village.

"But this pup here has the coat of a wolf," a peasant pointed out.

"So he is," answered Cornel. "I am going to raise him together with my dogs, to prove that kindness is better than a gun."

The peasants shook their heads disapprovingly. "A wolf remains a wolf, Cornel," they told him. "You cannot change his instincts. The only good wolf is a dead wolf."

The gipsy did not agree with them. "Kindness, kindness is the thing."

Yet they did smile at the antics of the pups. Then they began to urge Cornel to come to the inn and play for them.

"Come, we want to hear you play. But if you had caught the other wolf, Lica, instead of this one, it would have been better."

"Come, our hearts are hungry for your tunes."

"Come, our limbs want to sing. We have sorrowed enough."

And so they coaxed him until he took his violin from the nail on which it was hanging. And with Cornel at the head, playing as he walked ankle-deep in the soft mud of the road, they marched to the inn. And there was great merriment that Sunday. There was so much that they wanted to forget. Between times Cornel talked about his plan of raising the wolf. The knowing peasants frowned at first, then they smiled. It was amusing to hear him talk. Bercu, the most facetious of them all, promised to give Cornel a hen with her brood of fifteen chicks.

"That will teach the gipsy what a wolf is," he explained, winking to his neighbor.

"Very well, thanks, Bercu," Cornel accepted. "And I will show you that that wolf will never touch any of my hens, nor any of yours."

"Now, play, play, Cornel. You don't know about wolves, but you can play."

Then there was talk of Lica and how they would torture him when he should fall into their hands. Cornel listened, and his heart became sick because of their cruelty. So he played something they had never heard before. Slow and deep like a prayer it rose from the bow! The youngsters ceased their dancing and bared their heads as if they had suddenly entered the church. The four walls of the inn, lined with wine barrels, and the ceiling from which hung hams and pelts, had become a holy place. The gray-bearded gipsy standing in their midst was the priest. Down to their souls, to the innermost depths, his prayer of song reached. And it cleansed them of impure thoughts and made them feel that life could be made one of eternal sunshine and joy, and not what it was—one in which toil and winter and wolves played the greatest part. Why had they never thought of that before? Their sorrows seemed so small now.

When Cornel drew the last tone from his bow, Bercu kissed his hand reverently. Radu was crying. The innkeeper's eyes were moist. The women's heads were bowed, and the youngsters looked at one another furtively, ashamed

of the knives and pistols that protruded from their red sashes. Herta was sobbing with her head in her hands. Then she left the inn silently, walking slowly to her home. She had seen the pack trader that morning. He had looked at her without speaking.

Months passed, months of heavy toil which left the men and women too tired to play even on Sunday. From time to time news spread of Lica's new exploits—the killing of gendarmes, burning of farms, droves of oxen stolen and driven across the border into Hungary. Yet no one had even seen him face to face. He was like a destructive phantom. The more superstitious ones began to say that he was a *strigoi*, an evil spirit come down to earth, or that he had an enchanted life.

Meanwhile, the wolf in Cornel's yard grew larger and more powerful than any of the dogs in the litter he had been raised with. Herta would occasionally be taken aback by his bared fangs when the other dogs interfered with him, especially at feeding time. A pat of her hand on his head would bring Lupu to his senses and make him as playful, as submissive, as the others. Even the neighbors allowed Lupu to stray into their yards and play with their pups. In full-moon nights, when the dogs barked, the

young wolf raised his head and tried to bark. His howling scared the dogs at first, but they accustomed themselves to its lugubrious sound, and they ran about and played and chummed with him as if he were a dog. Among the grown, shaggy shepherd dogs he looked like one of them, except for the peculiarity of his stiff neck and his leanness. For no matter how much he fed, his ribs would stick out.

At the sound of Cornel's voice he would come running, and throw himself at his master's feet, and whine and howl until he was patted on the head.

But as summer advanced toward fall, and Lupu was six months old, neighbors began to complain that hens were being killed daily—hens and ducks and an occasional young kid. They did not directly accuse Lupu, for no one had caught him—yet Cornel knew what they thought. One neighbor begged that Cornel should chain the wolf.

"To avoid unjust suspicion? Why should we sin by accusing him?" he argued.

"Yes, chain him, if only to prove that another dog is doing the work of a wolf. It may even be so with Lica. A dozen other bad men may be doing the evil he is blamed for," cried Herta.

But Cornel frowned and refused. "If I chain

him, then he will forget all my kindness. It cannot be true what they think or say, for he has never touched any of our hens! I cannot believe it of him. We feed him well—we are kind to him. And with Lica it must have been the same. If anybody had ever been kind to him, he would remember.

Herta could have said how she had often been scared by the young wolf's bared fangs, yet she did not mention it. Her father was right—about the wolf—about Lica, also. And she trembled thinking of what would happen to him if he were caught.

Then a terrible thing happened. One early morning, later in the fall, just before the first snow fell, Herta was awakened by a frightful noise in their own hennery. She scrambled out of her bed and ran out. And there in the misty blue was Lupu, with another wolf of his own size, pawing away at the frightened fowl. More than a dozen were already flapping white wings in their own blood. She yelled from the depths of her lungs. Cornel came out with gun in hand. Herta, mute with fear, ran to his arms and pointed with her finger to Lupu and the other one who were running, each with a chicken in his teeth, toward the mountains.

Cornel let go with both barrels at the same

time, but he was only a good fiddler, Cornel was. He cried like a baby when he entered the hennery. It was more than the dead fowl that he mourned.

"What is of a wolf is wolf," the peasants told him.

And it was true. True, true! They were right.

"No earthly use to waste kindness on a wolf," the innkeeper tried to pacify the gipsy as he poured him a drink.

Cornel was inconsolable. He looked curiously at Herta when he returned home. She grieved more than he did. Her eyes were swollen from weeping.

A few days later another hennery was broken into, and not a dog barked to awaken his master. It was Lupu, who, being known to the dogs, had come and robbed when they least suspected him. They did not even bark when they heard him come. He was one of them. Days later he returned with his mate. Ordinarily, even a small shepherd dog is enough to scare the largest wolf. The wolf knows that the shepherd dog will always jump at him from behind, and that before he has turned his whole body the dog's teeth will be sunk in his neck. But Lupu had conquered the fear of dogs. Playing and pawing with the dogs, he had learned

not to fear them and not to fight them, always facing them when at bay. It kept them at a distance, for never yet has dog attacked a wolf facing him. Lupu's mate soon also conquered her fears and rubbed noses with the dogs before breaking into the henneries and corrals where the late-born lambs were kept. Lupu knew all the places and how to get into them.

In spite of all watchfulness, the robberies continued. Even pigsties were broken into, although a cordon of bonfires was kept burning night after night. Lupu had conquered his fear of fire. He had played near it with his former master, and he helped his mate also to conquer all the fears of wolfdom—man, dog, fire.

Every time a sheep was stolen or a hennery broken into, Cornel felt that it was because of him, because of his stupid belief in kindness. Now he understood what the phrase meant, "What is born of wolf, is wolf." Only it was too late. And when they talked of Lica, he no longer interposed himself in the bandit's favor. All wolves were alike. Unable to sleep, he roamed around with gun in hand through the forest and mountains to kill Lupu. But Lupu was too clever.

When the snow had fallen a few days, wolves led by Lupu began to come in great packs.

Never before had the beasts been so audacious. Many of the dogs had to be shot, for they behaved like the wolves themselves; stole and killed what they were supposed to guard. Other dogs fled to the forest, the wolf blood in them asserting itself when the masters beat them for reasons they did not understand.

There was no more playing of the fiddle for Cornel. He and Herta would sit facing each other, afraid of each other's thoughts, every time a depredation was committed. It was well for them that Papa Tanase, the priest, loved the gipsy and his daughter, for many a time an impoverished peasant had vowed to revenge himself and the others by setting fire to the *tzigan's* hut.

To top the evil, Lica and his band, like brothers to the wolves, made raid after raid and trimmed the flocks and the herds of the best in the corrals and stables. And every time, before a raid, Herta would see the pack trader in the village. Was it coincidence or was the pack trader one of Lica's spies? Herta thought and thought as she fingered the necklace he had given her.

Did he know that she suspected him? He came there unafraid. One word from her lips and his body would hang limply from a rope. . . . And yet, perhaps, he was innocent! He never spoke to her, avoided her hut, looked at her from a distance. She could feel his eyes on her even when turned away. Why, why, was he what he was? A wolf. A wolf—like Lupu.

By the time the snow had melted, there was not one peasant who had enough oxen to yoke

to a plow, not one who had enough eggs to color for Easter. Baba Tana, the sorceress, asked that on every third egg be painted a coffin. There was no eleventh egg in any house of the village. And when the peasants saw the terribly aged Cornel going into the forest every morning, and understood why he carried his gun, their hearts softened to him, but they said:

"Now he carries a gun. Last year he played his fiddle to wolves. He is the cause of our misfortunes."

And still no one alive could claim that he had seen Lica face to face.

One morning, the pack trader trod the roads of the village, entering every hut, talking, selling, bartering. Herta trembled like a leaf as she watched him from the door of her hut. Another raid? There was nothing more they could take. She would go up to him and tell him, and return the necklace to him. Better still, she would tell the peasants. And even if it should kill her, she would rid the country of another wolf. There were enough without him.

"Let me buy you a string of beads," asked her father. "Shall I call him?"

She did not answer. She looked out into the road. He was talking to women who fingered the beads.

While they were talking, heavy hoof beats were heard coming from the other end of the village, and gendarmes on horseback appeared with their short-barrelled carbines ready at hand. With the agility of a cat, the pack trader threw the pack from his shoulders, divested

himself of his heavy coat, and rising to his full height, he stood with a pistol in each hand, firing at the gendarmes.

Herta smothered a cry that rose to her lips. It was Lica. Lica himself!

When the smoke had thinned, the stranger was on horseback, on his own horse that had waited for him behind the trees and followed him as he had gone from hut to hut, and was firing, riding backward at full speed, with the gendarmes behind him, toward the wooded mountains. A number of peasants joined the gendarmes, for they all realized now who the pack trader was—Lica, Lica who had come to spy on them. The whole afternoon and far into the evening the women and children watched the road and listened to the shots that were fired in the mountains. Oh, they hoped it would be the end of Lica, the wolf. The gendarmes were at his heels. Yet—every time a shot was heard, Herta thought of the man's eyes and of his great agility as he divested himself of his pack and heavy coat, and she hoped—— He was so handsome. So strong. And he loved her. He loved her.

But no. He was like a wolf. Like Lupu. He and his wolves had impoverished the village. Another shot was fired. Her heart sank. She listened. They fired no longer. They had killed him. But her heart leaped with joy. Shot after shot was fired again. He was alive. Alive. That splendid body that rode so gracefully on the horse was ~~the~~ ^{there}. Those eyes were still open. Each shot was like a cry from his lips, "I am alive." She tightened her fingers

on the necklace he had given her and which she had never worn. He was alive.

The women came up to talk to her.

"He has sold me beads—this string here—look at it. And to me he sold a neckerchief. What did you buy from him, Herta?"

"Nothing."

"I hope they catch him. There is a prize of a thousand ducats of gold on his head. If they catch him, they ought to give the money to our men, that they buy cattle with it."

Cornel entered the forest, gun in hand. He had told Herta before going:

"I would gladly give ten years of my life if my bullet kills him."

Herta had looked at him. He had become like a stranger to her. Now she listened to the shots that reverberated in the mountains. How Lica had looked at her while he had put on the necklace! But a moment later she thought: He is like a wolf! He should be killed, even as Lupu should be killed. Her father was right. But when the firing ceased, her heart sank, her knees weakened, tears came to her eyes.

She entered her hut and listened through the open window. From time to time she heard a faint reverberation. They were far, far away—far on the other side of the mountains.

Late that night, while father and daughter were looking at each other by the faint light thrown by the floating oil candle that was burning in a glass under the holy image of Christ's mother—late that night, they heard a rap at the window. Startled from his reverie, the old gipsy called out, unbolting the window:

"Who is there?"

"A dying man," answered a feeble voice.

When Cornel unbolted the door, a man, bleeding and in tatters, stumbled inside.

"It's Lica," Herta called out.

And it was Lica, the wolf, wounded, dying. Before Herta had recovered from the shock, the old gipsy's gun was pointed at the man's breast.

"Father, a guest! *Our* guest. Remember that," she cried as she turned the weapon aside.

"A wolf," argued Cornel.

"It is a man, a dying man," cried Herta, holding the barrel of the gun.

Lica was unconscious. Father and daughter put him on the straw mattress near the fireplace and washed the wound in his chest. The whole night long, they watched the feverish man. Cornel looked at the man's chiseled features, at the long, velvety eyelashes over his closed eyes, at the fine, curved line of his mouth, the wide shoulders and the strong arms, and he thought: Could it be that such a creature should not respond to kindness?

During the night the wounded man was shaken by spasms. In one of those spasms he gave orders to his comrades. Herta's heart stopped beating while she listened. Then, of a sudden, he was still again.

"Listen to his heart. Is he still alive?" she begged her father.

"Just a flutter; just a flutter, Daughter. Some more water. And give me that flask of brandy."

The duty of a host to a wounded man was now uppermost in Cornel's mind. It was not

at all the same Cornel who had gone into the forest willing to give ten years of his life for the privilege of killing Lica.

Toward the morning, after a longer spasm followed by copious sweating, the wounded man began to breathe more regularly and fell asleep. When he opened his eyes he asked:

"Where am I?"

"Among friends," answered Cornel.

Herta was crying in her hands.

Lica smiled a sickening smile. "Call the gendarmes. A thousand ducats are on my head."

She gave him a drink of cold water. "You are our guest, Lica, not our captive."

He looked into her eyes as she spoke and held the cup to his mouth, propping up his head. "No—you will not betray me," he said softly. Then he leaned back and fell asleep again.

Cornel bowed his head. "We are warming another wolf, Herta, instead of exterminating him. Have I not brought enough misery upon the people?"

But Herta kissed away his tears. "We may yet make a man out of a wolf and thus repair our mistake with Lupu. Don't tell them anything. It's God's will. God led him to our door."

"So did He lead Lupu, the wolf. It seems to be His will that all wolves should come to my door," Cornel cried.

Had not Lica robbed the corrals and the stables of the village? A bullet was the best he was worth. Only Herta begged so! She in-

voked the law of hospitality against denouncing the wounded bandit. He would be hung, anyhow, when the gendarmes caught him. And even the peasants would think he had done wrong if he were to denounce a wounded guest—even if that guest happened to be Lica.

"But what if I refuse the price on his head?"

"Oh, Father, let me try, even as you have tried with Lupu!"

She was continually ministering to Lica, talking to him, fixing his pillow under his head, watching him. And he sought every opportunity to have her near him. One day, when Lica had for the first time in a month left his bed, he asked, after a long silence:

"There is a price of a thousand ducats on my head, Cornel. Why don't you take it? I am yet too weak to fight."

"Am I a wolf to feed on one of my own kind when he has fallen?" Cornel answered, angrily looking the man in the eyes.

Then Cornel sat down and told Lica the story of the wolf he had raised. And of how because of him the whole village had been impoverished—and yet Herta maintained that kindness was better than a gun when dealing with men. When Cornel finished his story, the bandit was in tears.

A few days before Easter Sunday, Lica disappeared from Cornel's hut. The gipsy had gone to a funeral, and Herta had gone to the well for water. When she returned, Lica was gone.

"He had no faith in us. A wolf, cruel and

suspicious. He was afraid the thousand ducats would tempt us," cried Cornel.

But Herta was calm and serene. She smiled and said: "It is as it should be. If he is still what he was, then I have failed, not he."

Cornel looked at his daughter and thought he understood.

That Sunday, while the priest was reading the services to the disheartened peasants, a great noise was heard on the road. Sheep were bleating, horses were neighing, cows were mooing. The peasants followed by the priest ran out. A whole herd of cattle was in front of the church. At the head of a dozen men on horseback rode Lica.

"I have brought you back what wolves have taken from you," he called out. "I am Lica. I have one bullet left in my pistol. It is for the man who will say Cornel was wrong when he tried to be kind to a wolf. And I shall also bring you new dogs. And they will guard well what belongs to their masters."

Then he dismounted. and kissing the hem of Herta's skirt, he cried:

"I was a wolf, myself."

A moment later he had disappeared in the mountains.

A week later he returned. Cornel himself played at the wedding of his daughter. And as no one claimed the thousand ducats of gold, Lica is still living on the River Oltu, where his flocks graze on the slopes of the green mountains.





E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS
Editor
LITTLE BLUE BOOKS